

WHAT THE PRESS HAS SAID ABOUT:

LARS HOLLMER

VIANDRA

2008

CUNEIFORM

Line-up: Lars Hollmer (accordions, keyboards, melodica, percussion, mandolin, mandola, voices, and more)

Michel Berckmans (bassoons, English horn, oboe, melodica (on "Baladeis"), Santiago Jimenez (violins), Andreas Tengberg (cello) and Morgan Ågren (additional drums on "Snabb"), Coste Aptrea (mandolin on "Alice"), Ulf Wallander (tenor sax on "Påztema"), Love Hollmer, Viggo Hollmer and Klara Pellas (voices on "Lilla Bye" and "Alive")

"...*Viandra* is -- astoundingly -- Lars Hollmer's first solo album to be released stateside. ...despite the appearance on various tracks of old friends like double-reedist Michel Berckmans and violinist Santiago Jimenez, along with cellist Andreas Tengberg and, in cameo appearances, drummer Morgan Ågren, Samlas member Coste Apetrea, saxophonist Ulf Wallander, and several Hollmer grandkids -- *Viandra* is truly a solo Hollmer endeavor in a way not heard since 1997's *Andetag*...

The music on *Viandra* (which translates as "We + Others") was recorded and mixed between 2001 and 2007... And the cover itself... Hollmer's photo collage... The music itself is as wide-ranging as that photo collage and as strangely -- sometimes as magically -- wonderful as anything Hollmer has recorded in his solo career. Lars dominates on keyboards and accordion and can also be heard on melodica, glockenspiel, digital drums, percussion, wordless vocals, mandolin, and more, while the strings and Berckmans' double reeds are secondarily the most dominant voices -- almost as if the more chamber-esque elements of Utsikter were married to Hollmer's '80s solo work. *Viandra* thus suggests a sweep back from 2007 through perhaps a quarter century of Lars' solo music, but more striking is the mood that he brings to the 16 compositions here... a sense of reflection sometimes touched with melancholy, a side of him sometimes lost in his collaborative projects with others.

"Alice" recalls the joyful innocence of "Simfågeldans"...written for an Alice in Wonderland theater project...but its conclusion turns harmonically dark.... Even the briefest and gentlest of interludes, such as the wistful "Moldaviska"...mixes simple beauty with elements of sad knowledge -- this piece was written for a film about Moldavian girls returning home after escaping...sex trafficking. Other pieces tinged with darkness, melancholy, or a sense of life's fleeting treasures include "Fosta 05," ... However, Hollmer doesn't drown all of his lighter aspects in a sea of despair; *Viandra* is far more nuanced than that, and there are occurrences of untempered joy, innocence, and fun on the playlist, such as the uptempo polka-informed "Strutt." ... Still, on *Viandra* Lars Hollmer's music speaks of journeys away and back home again to a place...where emotions run the deepest, but where life stories don't necessarily have happy endings. [4.5 stars out of 5]"

—Dave Lynch, *All Music Guide*, www.allmusic.com

"... The originator of Samla Mamma's Manna is an artist with incontestable transparency of intent, and *Viandra*,...is great; perhaps not on the masterwork level of...1997's *Andetag* (Krax), but pretty close. Hollmer's aesthetic remains consistent: childish candor enhanced by a harmonic sagacity equally indebted to Bach and Scandinavian folk music, boosted by the intricacy that made SMM stalwarts of Rock In Opposition. The compositions on *Viandra* unleash a Wonderfalls-like series of surprises... Hollmer knows how to astonish through dissonant activity on the periphery of apparently innocuous lullabies. ... Best of all is the superb triptych of "Påztema", "Prozessirk" and "Konstig (Strange)" at the CD's midpoint: prototypical specimens of the Swede's craft, these pieces alternate mystifying compositional devices (with Berckmans adding pinches of UniversZero-esque, bassoon-fueled mystery) and sudden openings onto poised consciousness, a poignant backwards look toward an unrepeatable, long-gone merriment."

—Massimo Ricci, *Paris Transatlantic Magazine*, October 2008, www.paristransatlantic.com

"...his beloved accordion...the most prominent feature in this gentle and easily accessible set of traditional and modern compositions, gathering musical pollen from the realms of folk, jazz, pop film, theatre and dance. Lars is joined by a stellar set of musical talent including Univers Zero's Michael Berkmann contributing some fine bassoon, oboe and horn parts...

Lars' work is always rhythmically interesting...with the title track which has a quirky mix of time signatures rattling the framework of a solid folk melody. Pre-war silent cinema could be the setting in "Mirror Objects" whilst "Snabb" is indeed fast, with its theatrical idiom and dense dualled drums supplemented by Morgan Ågren.

We could be at the circus in "Konstig"... I'm reminded...of Canada's Miriodor... They share a humorous and optimistic take on life... "Baladeis" is a rather more melancholic arrangement with a sonorous bassoon and English Horn... The doomy cello and bass drum of "Första 05" are set off by a violin lament and semitonal accordion in this dirge.

...the collection is completed by the longest work on the album... "Folkdron Menad"... Orchestra and choral parts are used to exquisite effect... a fittingly exotic closing piece in what is a highly personal work exposing the many facets of Lars Hollmer's talents."

—Richard Barnes, *Classic Rock Society*, Feb/March 2009 & *Sea of Tranquility*, September 2008

"A really enjoyable set of sixteen tracks by Swedish composer/accordionist/multi-instrumentalist Lars Hollmer with the assistance of a core quartet (including himself), augmented by a half a dozen additional players and voices.... Songs that feel like chamber music renditions of forlorn lullabies, lost Gypsy hymns, Aksak Maboul trading jokes with Penguin Cafe Orchestra, or soundtracks to nonexistent films from some dark corner of Europe."

—George Parsons, *Dream Magazine*, #9, www.dreamgeo.com

"Veteran keyboardist-accordionist's chamber quartet is informed by a wide range of folk traditions: Swedish polka and eastern among them with classical elements and improv..."

—Selwyn Harris, *Jazzwise*, Issue 124, October 2008

"...This was a pleasant surprise. ...Swedish keyboard and accordion player Hollmer has instantly captured my fancy and I want to hear...his other 11 solo albums. ...

...You'll find world music, folk, jazz, rock, Swedish pop tunes, minimalism, Fellini-esque film music, and Romantic period classical influences. There is also an innocence and simplicity a la The Penguin Cafe music, plus a Zappa-esque sense of humor. ...

... Contributing to the innocent sound of much of the music is the predominant use of simple instruments such as the melodica and mandolin. ..."

—John Henry, *Audiophile Audition*, June 26, 2008

"...there is wit, raucous good fun and a sense of joy in Lars Hollmer's music... With Hollmer, one can always expect a quirky...take on a crazy quilt of folk, jazz and of course, prog. The music is smart, sophisticated, even complex, though the melodies may be simple and folk-inflected. As intelligent and clever as his compositions can be, never does Hollmer cross over into...pompous self-importance. ...

When he wants...Hollmer can be thoughtful, serious, even introspective, as he is in "Overdago" and "Folkdron Menad." As in virtually all of his music, the results are magnificent."

—Dean Suzuki, *Progression*, Issue 55, Fall/Winter 2008

"new and noteworthy... Lars Hollmer *Viandra* (Cuneiform)" —Alexander Gelfand, *Jazziz*, Vol. 25 No. 08, October 2008

“Swedish multi-instrumentalist and co-founder of one of the earliest Rock in Opposition (RIO) groups, Samla Mammas Manna, Lars Hollmer has always been a melodic contrast to the...more outré explorations of companion groups like Henry Cow, Art Zoyd and Univers Zéro. Living in a universe of his own making, Hollmer's 2005 performance at Victoriaville, Canada's FIMAV festival drew heavily on his Scandinavian roots and there's no mistaking Hollmer's origins on *Viandra*. Still, it's a far more cosmopolitan affair that manages to be strangely innocent and frequently joyful despite being a more far-reaching sonic and emotional collage that's far deeper than its singable melodies might suggest. ...the involvement of Univers Zéro's Michel Berckmans...provides a direct tie between Hollmer and his RIO cousins. Even when its subject matter is dark...his music possesses an overarching joyful, albeit occasionally bittersweet, optimism that's in sharp contrast to Univers Zéro's darker landscapes.

There are more dramatic passages, with the serpentine melody of "Prozesscirk," performed in unison by Hollmer, Berckmans, violinist Santiago Jimenez and cellist Andreas Tengberg... Hollmer's idiosyncratic sense of humor surfaces on the aptly titled "Konstig (Strange),"... The interlocking counterpoint of the melancholy "Baladeis" still retains a compelling beauty that juxtaposes with the bright, polka-esque "Strutt (Strut),"... even when the mood is dark, there's an unmistakable poignancy that keeps *Viandra* thoroughly accessible. Folkloric elements imbue the title track, and the upbeat "Alice" reflects a happy exuberance... Hollmer's multi-instrumentalism lends this set a broad palette, but it's his accordions that dominate, and there are few others, aside from Guy Kulcevsek, Richard Galliano and Jean-Louis Matinier, who can make the instrument sing the way Hollmer does. ...Hollmer's humanity shines through..."

—John Kelman, *All About Jazz*, July 30 2008, www.allaboutjazz.com

“...the music is composed by starting from the accordion. The most melodic and also happy pieces seem to be born out of ideas of mostly Swedish folk music (an occasional klezmer/jazzy flavour is also noticeable). These pieces sound a bit like instrumental “songs”. ... The arrangements...are rather a bit linear...and stay close to the same melody, just texturing some depth into it (sax, violin, bass, keyboards,...), or extra colours (mellotron). But they're more often leaning to a slightly classical flavour. ... A few attempts are made for a more classical-chamber/“symphonic” approach of a Rock In Opposition nature (like with Samla Mammas Manna)... there are also the more dramatic or melancholic parts, with orchestra...”

—Gerald Van Waes, *psychevanhetfolk*, www.psychedelicfolk.com

“While the album itself comes across as being sonically saturated throughout evenly, the lineup varies from...Hollmer doing everything on his own...to a quartet, with...Michel Berkmanns (of Univers Zero), Santiago Jimenez and Andreas Tendberg – on about a half of the tracks. ... it's Lars's accordion that is in most cases in the focus of this recording's overall sound. ...the music on “*Viandra*” belongs to several genre domains... On six of the tracks, namely *the title piece, Mirror Objects, Moldaviska, Strut, Merged with Friends* and *Seek*, Lars seems to pay homage to his native folk music... With the exception of *Merged with Friends*, all these are emotionally uplifting... Of the two tracks featuring vocalizations, *Little Bye and Alice*, ...both are strongly reminiscent of songs for children... There is one more bunch of stylistically kindred compositions...*Prozesscirk, Baladeis, First 05, Ovendago* and *Folkdron Menal*, ... these are filled with a deep sense of drama. ...an amalgamation of classical and neoclassical influences... each of the compositions is a real thing of beauty... imagine classic Art Zoyd performing something halfway between Modest Mussorgsky's “Pictures at an Exhibition” and “Messe en re-Mineur” by Wapassou with elements of Igor Stravinsky's “The Firebird”. Finally, *Strange* brings together all the styles ever available on the recording plus Rock-In-Opposition... think Univers Zero, Art Zoyd, L'Ensemble Raye, the Hamster Theatre and Samla Mammas Manna...

...Lars Hollmer's music has a strong identity to it...”

—Vitaly Menshikov, *Progressor*, January 10, 2009, www.progressor.net

“...Lars is a unique amalgam of folk music from Sweden and lots of other countries, rock, pop, jazz, experimental, improvised, cabaret, film, circus music to name but a few. At ... Krax home page it is described as 'music as eccentric, avant-garde, extreme, intelligent, intimate, crazy, adventurous, bizarre, progressive, elusive, childish, capricious and as difficult to define as ever'. It still is, and more! Listening to *Viandra*, I might add...some sombre moments, too. ...

... a few tracks ...seem closer to new/contemporary "serious" music... Almost small chamber compositions for accordion, keyboards, violin, cello, bassoon, oboe ... Lars' wilder accordion excesses and quiet melancholic pieces still dominate... My favourite tracks range from the short and bitter-sweet melancholic... "Moldaviska", via the sweet melancholic lazy "Påztema"...to the happy-go-lucky "Strutt (Strut)"...the fireworks of the partly drum-driven "Snabb (Fast)", the somewhat ominous and warped fairground waltz "Konstig (Strange)", the slow, gloomy and serious "Första 05 (First 05)" and so on.... The only element I miss compared to other solo albums by Lars is his voice. ...

... The album is Lars' first to be released by the great US independent label Cuneiform... *Viandra* is ... one of my top three favourite albums of 2008 so far and might be as convenient an introduction to his unique music as most of his other solo output. After all, 95 percent of his melody lines here couldn't have been written by anybody else and all the arrangements are 100 percent pure UNIQUE LARS HOLLMER. ...“

—LUNA KAFÉ E-ZINE, 8/16/08, WWW.LUNAKAFE.COM/MOON146/SE146.PHP

ARTICLES & FEATURES & CONCERTS:

“Lars's music is hard to pigeonhole. It is experimental, blending the serious, the joyful and the absurd with an honesty that borders on the naive. There are elements of rock, ballad, comic song, art music and hymn, often with echoes of world music.”

—*Swedish Performing Rights Society*, February 1, 2005

“...the keyboardist/accordionist and (arguably) backbone for much loved Swedish eccentrics SAMLA MAMMAS MANNA and their various offshoots ...Hollmer has proved himself to be a highly inventive solo artist and a valued collaborator with countless avant-garde/progressive musicians...

His solo work...is characterized by an unsurprising dominance of accordion and keyboards, avant-garde sensibilities tempered by a superb understanding of harmony as well as disharmony, an abundance of folk, jazz and classical influences and a playful sense of humor.

...The music of Lars Hollmer is highly recommended to fans of RIO who still know how to appreciate a good melody...” —*ProgArchives.com*

“...this is Edgefest's 10th anniversary. That calls for a celebration...”

“It really is an important milestone for us,” artistic director and festival co-founder Dave Lynch says. ...

...he may be most excited about Saturday' night's Kerrytown Concert House performance from Swedish composer and musician Lars Hollmer, who will perform as part of Lars Hollmer's Ann Arbor Global Home Project, a new group formed exclusively for Edgefest '06.

“This is perhaps the single most ambitious concert that I have personally organized,” he says. “Lars Hollmer's been recording, composing and performing music on keyboards and accordions since 1969, and has been compared to everyone from Astor Piazzolla and Nino Rota to Brian Eno.

There are elements of everything in there. It's too rock to be considered folk, and it's too folk to be considered jazz, it's too classical to be considered experimental, and it's too noisy to be considered..." Lynch's voice trails off, piling on a few more of the connections that exist within Hollmer's music. The composer's music seems to represent everything Lynch loves about creating Edgefest each year. ...

"When they hear his music, certain folks may ask, "Why is he in an avant-garde music festival?" Lynch says. But I'll say that Lars Hollmer could be one of the leading musicians and composers of the late 20th century and early 21st century. And everyone inevitably loves the music."

–Johnny Loftus, "Close to the edge: Edgefest celebrates 10 years of music and creativity", *Metro Times*, www.metrotimes.com, 10/11/2006

"...In a new world in which rock is no longer just guitars, jazz is no longer simply about trumpets and saxophones, and the very genres all blend, every instrument gets its due, and accordionists have hit back with a vengeance. ...

Sweden's Lars Hollmer is one of the most original members of this new tribe. ... What has made him stand out from the beginning, however, is his compositional and conceptual ability; as with Astor Piazzola...his instrumental work and compositional work are inseparable. ...the main characteristic of his art is that it defies all attempts at facile classification.

...to choose one word...kaleidoscopic. Rock rhythms, various European, South American, and Asian folklike refrains, jazz riffs, nineteenth- and twentieth-century symphonic strains, and schmaltzy Swedish pop swirl by. The word eclectic does not do this justice; he is more what the French call a bricoleur... What makes this all work is Hollmer's strong sense of musical form. He is, above all, a disciplined composer, and his work is constantly changing, as he seeks out new collaborators in this native Sweden, in Canada, or in Japan. "

–Piotr Michalowski, *Arborweb*, October 2006, www.arborweb.com

"My influences? Hard to tell. Of course I like artists like Robert Wyatt, Albert Marcoeur, Tamla Movton, Wagner, Beethoven, Prokofieff...even some stuff of Michael Jackson."

Lars Hollmer is a true original. From his home base in Uppsala, Sweden, Hollmer and his accordion explore sublime regions of varied musical worlds, drawing on rock, prog, Scandinavian folk music, circus music, organ grinders and other cultural traditions. ...

... Just about any sounds or rhythms that may enter his world seem to be fair game and may eventually turn up on a composition. He is a noted keyboard player often blending his compositional pieces with a ferocious ability to improvise. ... "I always write the music down on paper," he said. "I need to do it to be able to communicate with other musicians. I compose everything myself from the heart. ..."

–William Burke, "Outside the Chicken Shack: Lars Hollmer Brings Sammla Mama to the U.S.", *The Squid's Ear*, 2003-12-15

"Luna Kafé concert review: Lars Hollmer: Bla, Oslo, September 30th 1999 ...

...The music of Lars Hollmer is not easy to pin down. It includes traces of the folk music of Sweden and lots of other countries, rock, pop, jazz, experimental, improvised, cabaret – in a Kurt Weill kind of way, film – Nino Rota (of Fellini and *The Godfather* theme Fame) is not too far away, circus music, etc. This mix includes slow melancholy, humour, ominous omens, breathtaking tempo and sounds like no one else. It's pure Lars Hollmer music. This evening most songs were taken from Lars' latest solo offering *Andetag*... Most of the songs have a certain film quality. They are almost small movies by themselves.

The musicians appreciated each other's company... there was a certain kind of good-time magic in the air. ..." – JP, *Lunakafe*, www.lunakafe.com